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The Signs of Chinese Communist Friendliness

1. Ambassador Wang Ping-nan's affable endeavors to promote tete-a-tete meetings with US diplomats are best assessed in the context of Peiping's past initiatives to expand contacts with high-ranking US officials.
2. Chou En-lai's offer during the Bandung Conference in 1955 to discuss outstanding issues with the United States is a case in point. His statement led to the ambassadorial talks which have now been under way for six years. In the first years of the ambassadorial meetings, the Chinese often proposed that they be raised to the foreign ministers' level.
3. The high hostage value Peiping attached to the American prisoners in China reflected its interest in maintaining official contacts with the United States. "Let's face the facts," one high Chinese Communist foreign ministry official told an American in 1957. "Suppose we release your people today. What guarantees are there that you won't immediately break off the talks which the two governments are having in Geneva?"

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4. Overtures to establish new channels of negotiation with the United States were less in evidence during the closing years of the Eisenhower administration, but the advent of the Kennedy administration necessitated some rethinking in Peiping. The Chinese Communists had taken comfort in the analysis that US rigidity on Sino-American issues was isolating the United States from its allies and was exasperating to most of the uncommitted countries. There was danger now that the signs of flexibility in Washington would put the onus of intransigence on Peiping. Chinese Communist propaganda reacted with renewed warnings about the US "peace fraud," which made Kennedy even "more tricky, more Machiavelian than Eisenhower, hence more vicious and more dangerous."

5. The propaganda invective reflects Peiping's estimate that American policy is probably not grounded in any expectation of a rapprochement with Communist China but rather in the necessity of developing a better position for opposing its objectives in Asia. This estimate, however, does not preclude a decision to explore the new attitude in Washington for possible advantages to Peiping. The advantages the Chinese Communists would hope to gain are several:

a. The first is to find out just what course US policy is going to take under the new administration and, in particular, whether the United States is disposed to

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make any specific concessions to Communist China. A recurring theme in Peiping's public statements and in private communications intended for transmission to Washington is the necessity of an American initiative to improve Sino-US relations. As Chen Yi put it in his conversation last March with the Swedish ambassador in Peiping, the United States has not yet reciprocated concessions already made by Peiping. Less than two weeks later Chen suggested that the withdrawal of the Seventh Fleet from Taiwan waters "ought not to be a difficult thing" for a beginning.

b. In the current state of Sino-Soviet relations, Peiping may be especially interested in developing its own channels of communication with the United States. Peiping's attitude on this point probably derives from the suspicion that Soviet negotiators could not be as solicitous of China's interest as the Chinese themselves. It is this suspicion that accounts, in some part, for Chinese Communist coolness to Khrushchev's summitry, evidenced in the reserved tone of Peiping editorial comment on the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting and in Peiping's failure to send newsmen to cover the event.

c. If no US concessions are forthcoming, Peiping can still profit by leaking information of new contacts with the United States. A prime target of the leak would be

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Chinese Nationalist morale, already depressed by growing misgivings about evolving American attitudes on such issues as Mongolian recognition and "two China's". Peiping has long demonstrated an abiding interest in shaking Nationalist resolve by propaganda alleging the unreliability of American allies

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d. Another target of the leak would be the non-Communist countries generally, Peiping would like all American parleys with the Chinese to be taken as auguries of US agreement to Communist China's acceptance in international councils. A most desirable outcome, from Peiping's viewpoint, would be a bandwagon atmosphere which inclined at least a bare majority to vote for ouster of the Nationalists and for Chinese Communist membership in the UN.

e. Communist China's current economic difficulties and the deterioration in the Sino-Soviet alliance have apparently suggested to some Chinese the economic advantages of improved relations with the United States. Chen Yi publicly insisted last November that the Communists would oppose consideration of such "petty profits," but he acknowledged that some "democrats" in Peiping had been corrupted by the idea. Chen's remarks on this point were in the pattern of other Chinese

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declarations disclaiming US assistance which unfriendly propaganda could picture as a demonstration of Communist failures. Although the Chinese take a sober view of the country's economic plight, they apparently still subordinate the economic element to the political factors affecting Sino-US relations.

5. In the most recent approaches made by the Chinese Communists, the talk has turned around the subject of Laos and the negotiations in Geneva. Peiping's eye at the moment appears especially cocked for US concessions in this area. Commentary in the Western press has afforded Peiping warrant for feeling that the United States wants to get out of Laos as gracefully as possible and that some softening of Chinese attitudes might perhaps facilitate the process. In this connection, Peiping hopes that other Western nations will maintain a certain amount of pressure on the United States, and to this end, the Chinese have been cultivating other Westerners in Geneva besides the Americans. When Chen Yi left Geneva, Peiping radio claimed that "even Western delegates" had been impressed by the "conciliatory spirit" of the Chinese representatives within and outside the conference.

6. An inkling as to the prospects for US gains from exploratory meetings with the Chinese is afforded by Mao Tse-tung's "paper tiger" analysis, which elaborates the thesis that the

strategic (long-term) position of the United States is weak. There is, therefore, no warrant, in Mao's view, for Peiping's making a concession on such a basic question as its claim to Taiwan. He admits, however, that the tactical (short-term) situation favors the United States in certain areas, and he could rationalize a Chinese Communist concession that does not compromise Peiping's basic objectives. In 1955 for example, Peiping agreed that American prisoners in China would be released--an agreement which it refuses to honor completely but which did result in the return of most of the Americans in Chinese jails. Both the historical record and the Communist texts thus suggest that concessions to the United States are possible but that the Chinese are determined not to concede very much. As a foreign ministry official once expressed Peiping's attitude, "China's policy toward the United States is to propose peaceful talks for easing tension on the one hand, and take an unwavering attitude toward her on the other."

*A footnote on Wang Ping-nan: Wang is an old hand at the game of demonstrative affability to Americans. In the period 1942-45 he was a Communist spokesman in Chungking, and in 1946-47 he was the senior spokesman in Nanking. In those years he was readily accessible to American officials and often took the initiative in arranging conversations with them. His primary objective in such talks was clearly that of obtaining whatever clues he could as to the future course of US policy. He was also interested in encouraging the belief that a Communist China

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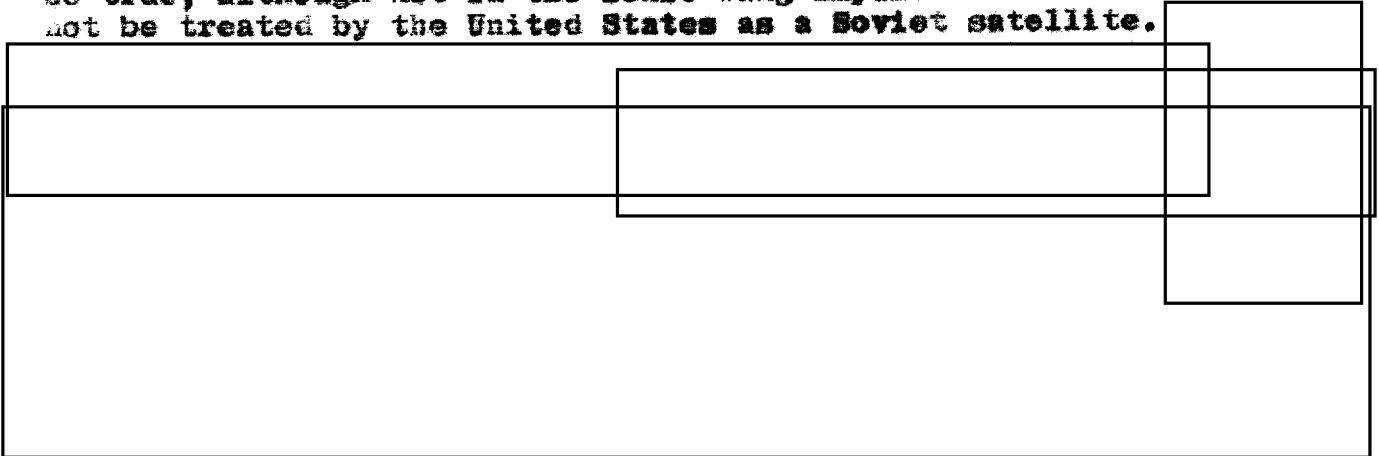
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would not be a docile partner of the USSR--which turned out to be true, although not in the sense Wang implied--and thus should not be treated by the United States as a Soviet satellite.

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